

Blue Planet Run in Washington, D.C.

Friday, August 31, 2007

Remarks by Benjamin H. Grumbles

- Thank you Jin (Zidell) for your kind introduction. It is my pleasure to join all of you at the Washington, D.C. stop of the Blue Planet Run. The first-ever around-the-world non-stop relay, organized by the Blue Planet Run Foundation (and sponsored by Dow Chemical Company) aims to raise awareness and funds to deliver safe drinking water to people worldwide who are without access.
- I applaud the team of 20 international citizen athletes for the Blue Planet Run. I would also like to recognize the coordinators and volunteers who are making this Run possible.
- Water unites us all – nations, communities, families, newly-weds. Every country shares EPA's goal of ensuring clean, safe, and secure water for its citizens. We certainly have our challenges in the U.S.
- One of this country's biggest environmental challenges today is the ability to maintain and sustain our nation's water and wastewater infrastructure.

- The systems that deliver our drinking water and treat our wastewater are too often taken for granted, and maintaining those systems so that they are operating today and into the future is a challenge. There is growing awareness that it's not just an EPA challenge, or a local challenge – it's everyone's challenge.
- EPA is spreading the word about the importance of infrastructure. It shouldn't take a bridge collapse or a water mainbreak but sometimes it does. We are being proactive to help people understand investments in water infrastructure are investments in their communities. We are working with our state and local partners, as well as the private sector, to help citizens understand the value of water to their communities, their families, their individual bodies. Only when everyone understands that water truly is our lifeblood will they accept that we all must invest in our infrastructure to receive this value.
- We all share in the responsibility of protecting the environment, especially our water resources-- whether it's developing technologies to detect and reduce emerging pollutants, or promoting water efficiency in businesses and communities, or identifying new ways to finance the repair and maintenance of our water and wastewater utilities, we all have an important role to play.

- But the water challenges faced by many other countries can seem insurmountable – even unapproachable.
- While those of us in the U.S. deal with parts-per-billion of one contaminant or another, the developing world is dealing with billions on another level, in reality 1.1 billion people – the staggering number of people without any access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation in India and Africa, South America, and of course, Asia.
- Earlier this year, I traveled to China and saw first-hand the challenge and the heartbreak. I shared with our Chinese colleagues the U.S. Government's goals towards our international cooperation efforts on water, and I would like to share them with you as well.
- At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the U.S. Government launched the “Water for the Poor” initiative. This three-year initiative was recently completed. During its 3 years under the initiative, the U.S. obligated more than \$1.7 billion to more than 100 activities throughout the world. Over 24 million people received improved access to safe water and more than 26 million received improved access to sanitation.
- The continuing commitment of the United States to help provide safe drinking water and sanitation is established by the *Water for the Poor Act*,

signed by President Bush in December 2005, and named for Senator Paul Simon, one of its champions.

- The “Water for the Poor” efforts have advanced the three goals of our international water strategy: 1) increasing and improving access; 2) improving management and productivity; and 3) strengthening cooperation.
- EPA is supporting State Department and USAID efforts to promote innovative and effective actions in developing countries by governments, corporate citizens, and NGOs. Just as in the U.S., the solutions are most successful when the residents who use the water are part of the planning and the project.
- Margaret Mead once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” She probably meant to say “Never doubt that a small group of runners...” You and your growing network of supporters are raising awareness (and money) and that leads to action.
- Water is life. Sanitation is dignity. Access is justice. Add them up and it means hope and opportunity for this precious Blue Planet we call home.
- Thank you.